



Preconception Care: 12 Things To Do Before You Become Pregnant

Before you become pregnant, you want to be in the best physical and mental health you can be. Here are some suggestions to help you achieve this goal.

1. Talk with your partner about having a baby to be sure you both are ready. Talk about the financial impact of pregnancy as well as the physical and emotional impact. Is your relationship strong enough to handle the stress of pregnancy and childrearing? If you are not married, talk about marriage. Statistically, children with married parents have more advantages. Babies are cute and sweet but they are not babies forever. Are you ready to be responsible for the many needs of a crying baby, a demanding small child, a volatile adolescent? Becoming a parent will change your life forever.
2. Do you have health insurance? If you do not have health insurance and cannot afford to pay a private health care provider for a preconception health care visit, make an appointment at your local health department. The nurse, nurse practitioner, or physician there can help you for a very reasonable fee based on your income. Ask for a family planning appointment when you call.
3. See your health care provider before you begin trying to become pregnant in order to be in good health at the time of conception. Part of good health before you become pregnant is having your partner and yourself checked for sexually transmitted infections and treated if necessary. Sexually transmitted infections can keep you from getting pregnant. They can be harmful to the baby if you do become pregnant. Tell your health care provider you are planning to become pregnant. Ask for their advice. Finally, ask about the menstrual cycle if you are uncertain about how it works and when fertile days occur.
4. Tell your health care provider about any medications you may be taking including over-the-counter medications or herbal supplements.
5. Take a multivitamin with 400 microgram of folic acid prior to becoming pregnant or take a prenatal vitamin daily. Folic acid, prior to and during early pregnancy, helps prevent birth defects of the spinal cord. Prenatal vitamins are available over-the-counter or your health care provider can prescribe them.
6. Stop using tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs. Ask your health provider for advice on how to quit. Many health care providers also recommend that you stop using or reduce significantly your intake of caffeine.
7. Try to be at or near your ideal weight at the time of conception. Choose a healthy, well-balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Ask your health care provider about seeing a registered dietician. There are registered dieticians with the WIC program (see #12) at your local health department.

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8. Walk for 30 minutes everyday. It will help you control your weight, lift your mood, and help you sleep better. If you do not feel like it is safe to walk in your neighborhood, consider walking laps in a local mall or shopping center. Invite a friend or ask your partner to walk with you.
9. When you are ready, stop using your method of birth control. If you were using a hormonal method of birth control (Pill, Patch, Ring, Shot), try to have at least one month without birth control and one period at the end of that month before conceiving. This will help your health provider establish your due date correctly. During this month you could use over-the-counter male or female condoms or you could use a spermicide or you could use both a condom and a spermicide. Some health care providers will ask you to do this for 3 months prior to conceiving. Find out what your health care provider prefers.
10. Keep track of your periods. Write down the first day the menstrual bleeding begins each month. Your due date is based on the date of the first day of your last normal menstrual period. Also take note of whether or not the menstrual period was “normal for you”.
11. Women do not miss their period until about two weeks after conception. Most pregnancy tests can pick up the hormones of pregnancy in urine as early as a week after conception. However, it is recommended that you do not have a urine test until your menstrual period is at least one week late. By waiting, the accuracy of the test improves.
12. Report to your health care provider for prenatal care as soon as you suspect you are pregnant. If you do not have health insurance or do not have health insurance that covers pregnancy, report to your local health department. There is a type of TennCare just for pregnant women. The staff at your health department will assess whether or not you qualify for this program. Most women who do not have private health insurance will qualify. Staff at the health department can also see if you will qualify for WIC, a federal food voucher program for pregnant women and children. Many health departments also offer support and prenatal education through a series of home visits. Just ask!

